

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
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USIA-06 EB-07 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /066 W
-----161110Z 090187 /15
R 160745Z JUN 77
FM AMCONSUL MILAN
TO AMEMBASSY ROME
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 5443

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MILAN 1051

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ECON, PINT, IT

SUBJECT: ABLE FROM PIACENZA, JUNE 14, 1977

1. SUMMARY. PIACENZA, LAST OF EMILIA ROMAGNA PROVINCES TO TURN LEFT (IN 1975), IS DOING WELL ECONOMICALLY BUT POLITICAL PARTIES EMBROILED IN QUARRELS. PCI-PSI CITY ADMINISTRATION COMPLAINS OF LACK OF FUNDS ON ONE HAND AND, ON OTHER, UNHELPFUL DC ATTACKS FROM OPPOSITION. MOST INTERESTING FINDING WAS DC AND CHURCH WILLINGNESS TO CARRY BATTLE TO ENEMY. END SUMMARY.

2. EXECUTIVE OFFICER TRAVELLED JUNE 14 TO PIACENZA AND SPOKE WITH BISHOP, PREFECT, MAYOR, TWO PROVINCIAL PARTY SECRETARIES (DC AND PRI) AND ONE FORMER ONE (PSI), LOCAL NEWSPAPER EDITOR, AND MACHINERY MANUFACTURER WHO IS ONE OF PROVINCE'S LARGEST EMPLOYERS.

3. PIACENZA, ON NORTHERMOST EDGE OF COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED EMILIA-ROMAGNA REGION, IS PRINCIPALLY AGRICULTURAL PROVINCE (TOMATOES, FRUIT) TO WHOSE
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ECONOMY FOOD PROCESSORS, MERCAHNTS, TRANSPORTERS, AND SMALL INDUSTRIALISTS HAVE SUCCEEDED IN GIVNG VARIED CHARACTER. ASKED HOW THAT ECONOMY FARING, CONTACTS GAVE SAME OLD STORY. PROBLEMS THAT ARE GRAVE IN LARGE CITIES, LIKE UNEMPLOYMENT, ARE LARGELY ABSENT HERE. THREE LOCAL PLANTS EMPLOYING 800 WHOSE CUSTOMERS ARE FARMERS AND OIL AND CHEMICAL

INDUSTRIES HAD ORDER BOOKS FILLED INTO 1978 AND HAD TROUBLE FINDING SEMI-SKILLED LABOR. NONE OF PLANTS WAS ARBOS, WHICH WHITE MOTOR CORPORATION OF CLEVELAND HAD SOLD OFF YEAR AGO AS CHRONIC MONEY-LOSER. UNDER MANAGEMENT OF NEW, LOCAL INVESTOR (BIFFI FARM MACHINERY), COMPANY IS NOW PROFITABLE. BIFFI, IN FACT, IS EXPANDING AND DICKERING NOW TO BUY UP SMALL COMPETITOR COMPANY IN LOS ANGELES.

4. POLITICALLY, THINGS NOT GOING SO SMOOTHLY. PCI-PSI CITY GOVERNMENT, WHICH REPLACED CENTER-LEFT ADMINISTRATION AFTER JUNE 1975 ELECTIONS, IS NOT HAVING EASY TIME OF IT. PCI MAYOR AND FORMER PSI PROVINCIAL SECRETARY DWELT ON CITY'S LACK OF FUNDS, WITH LATTER DESCRIBING CITY GIUNTA'S MAIN JOB AS "ADMINISTERING THE DEBT." BISHOP SAID COMMUNISTS DOING EVEN POORER JOB THAN DC THEY REPLACED, INCLUDING SQUANDERING PUBLIC MONEY ON PROPAGANDA SCHEMES. PCI INITIATIVES INCLUDED RATHER UGLY FIFTY THOUSAND DOLLAR MONUMENT TO RESISTANCE FIGHTERS, FREE TRIPS TO SEASHORE FOR OLD PEOPLE, AND YOUTH FESTIVALS--ALL PUBLIC RELATIONS PLOYS, HE CALIMED, THAT LEFT REAL PROBLEMS, LIKE HEALTH AND HOUSING, UNSOLVED.

5. ANOTHER IRRITANT FOR CITY GOVERNMENT HAVE BEEN TROUBLES OF PCI MAYOR FELICE TRABACCHI, LIKEABLE LAWYER WHO IS REGARDED--BY BISHOP AT LEAST--AS MORE HUMANE THAN SOME OF HIS PCI COLLEAGUES. HE IS SAID CONFIDENTIAL

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TO HAVE ENEMIES WITHIN OWN PARTY, LIKE DEPUTY AND FORMER PCI PROVINCIAL SECRETARY MARIO CRAVEDI. AND HE WAS PUBLICLY EMBARRASSED BY PUBLICATION AT HOSTILE HANDS OF TAX COLLECTION RESULTS WHICH SHOWED HIM PAYING ABOUT SAME MODEST AMOUNT AS OTHER LAWYERS. (PCI NIXED ATTEMPT BY PSI TO HAVE LIST PUBLISHED BY CITY.) THESE TROUBLES, ACCORDING TO NEWSPAPER EDITOR, HAVE LEFT MAYOR GOOD DEAL LESS EXHUBERANT THAN AT BEGINNING OF HIS TENURE.

6. AS IF ALL THAT NOT ENOUGH, LEFTIST ADMINISTRATION UNDERGOING AGGRESSIVE ATTACK BY DC. ATTRACTIVE 28 YEAR OLD DC PROVINCIAL SECRETARY PINUCCIO SIDOLI, WHO IS ALSO MAYOR OF HIS SMALL COMMUNE AND POSSIBLY YOUNGEST PROVINCIAL SECRETARY IN COUNTRY, SAID HE INTENDS FOR DC TO PLAY TRADITIONAL OPPOSITION ROLE, CRITICIZING PROJECTS OF MAJORITY--LIKE PLAN FOR NEW PROVINCIAL HOSPITAL--ON THEIR MERITS. THAT, HE SAID, IRRITATES COMMUNISTS, WHO WOULD LIKE TO ACHIEVE

CONSENSUS BEFOREHAND ON CONTROVERSIAL MATTERS BY INVITING OTHER PARTIES TO CONSULT. DC WAS ROUNDLY CRITICIZED FOR THIS BEHAVIOR NOT ONLY BY SOCIALISTS BUT BY REPUBLICAN PROVINCIAL SECRETARY, WHO CLAIMED THAT WHAT SITUATION CALLED FOR WAS NOT CONFRONTATION WITH PCI BUT COMMON SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS. DC SECRETARY, HOWEVER, THOUGHT HIS PARTY ON WINNING TACK. HE POINTED TO 1976 NATIONAL ELECTION WHERE DC LOCALLY RECOVERED SIX PERCENTAGE POINTS AS COMPARED WITH 1975, SIZEABLE LEAP INDEED. (PCI STAYED EVEN.)

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7. OTHERS INCLUDING CHURCH STARTING TO REACT AS WELL. BISHOP SAID THAT, AFTER YEARS OF TRYING UNSUCCESSFULLY TO REGULARIZE STATUS OF CHURCH-RUN HOME FOR MENTALLY DEFICIENT CHILDREN (WHICH COULD HAVE BEEN ACCUSED OF SPENDING FUNDS IT RECEIVED FROM STATE WITHOUT PROPER AUTHORIZATION), HE GATHERED HIS COURAGE, WENT TO SEE PCI PRESIDENT OF REGION, AND THREATENED TO CLOSE CHILDREN'S HOME AND PUT BLAME ON AUTHORITIES IF STATE RECOGNITION NOT FORTHCOMING FAST. HE GOT IT. DC SECRETARY ADDED THAT DC-CATHOLIC COMMUNITY BECOMING MORE ACTIVE. CATHOLIC ACTION GROUP NO LONGER DORMANT, FOR EXAMPLE, AND ORGANIZATION CALLED CATHOLIC LABOR MOVEMENT IS AT WORK. FINALLY, EDITOR OF LIBERTA' NEWSPAPER SAID HE AND COLLEAGUES WILL SOON START TELELIBERTA', LOCAL TV STATION INTENDED NOT TO POLEMICIZE WITH PCI BUT TO PRESENT NON-COMMUNIST VIEWPOINT TO COUNTERBALANCE COMMUNIST INITIATIVES OF SAME TYPE. DC SECRETARY THOUGHT TOTALITY OF THESE MOVES REPRESENTED REAL CHANGE

IN BEHAVIOR OF SEGMENT OF PUBLIC TIRED OF LETTING
COMMUNISTS HAVE FLOOR TO THEMSELVES.

8. PSI, FOR ITS PART, WAS SOMEWHAT CRITICAL OF
PCI GIUNTA PARTNERS BUT SPOKE ESPECIALLY BITTERLY
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OF DC. BOTH PREVIOUS SECRETARY AND PROVINCIAL COM-
MITTEE MEMOER CLAIMED THAT NOTHING HAD CHANGED
IN DC BEHAVIOR. DC REACTIONARY TENDENCIES WERE
INTACT (WITNESS ABORTION LAW REVERSAL IN
ROME) AND SPOILS SYSTEM IN GOOD HEALTH (WITNESS
DC REFUSAL TO SURRENDER BANK PRESIDENCIES TO QUALI-
FIED PEOPLE). NOR WERE THEY HIGH ON CRAXI, WHO
DID NOT APPEAR TO BE SUCCEEDING IN BRINGING SOCIALIST
PARTY TOGETHER ALTHOUGH HE WAS GOOD MAN WHO WAS
TRYING.

9. AS FOR NATIONAL SCENE, NO ONE SEEMED EXCITED
OVER PROSPECT OF MULTI-PARTY AGREEMENT ON SPECIFIC
PROGRAM THAT WOULD REPRESENT FURTHER SHARING IN
GOVERNMENTAL POWER BY PCI. PREFECT SAID AGREEMENT
WAS NECESSARY AND THAT PUBLIC WAS PAYING LITTLE
ATTENTION TO ITS IMPLICATIONS. PRESIDENT OF BIFFI,
WHO IS ALSO FORMER PSI PROVINCIAL SECRETARY, THOUGHT
PCI AS FAR FROM POWER AS EVER. HE FELT THAT DC,
IN STRONG POSITION AND BEHAVING AS PRUDENTLY
AND CAGILY AS EVER, WOULD KEEP COMMUNISTS IN WAITING
ROOM FOR ANOTHER DECADE OR MORE. HE ALSO CLAIMED
TO NOW OF ADVOCATES WITHIN PSI OF RETURN TO GOVERN-
MENT WITH DC.

10. PIACENZA, IN OTHER WORDS, IS SCENE OF INCHOATE
REACTION AGAINST LEFTIST CULTURAL AND POLITICAL
HEGEMONY AND PROVINCE WHERE LEFTIST (AND REPUBLICA)
FEELING AGAINST DC, IN TURN, RUNNING HIGH. NOT THAT
COMPETITION IS UNCIVILIZED. PREFECT SAID THERE WAS
NO COLD WAR ELEMENT IN DC-PCI RELATIONS AND EVEN
DC SECRETARY WAS FAR FROM ANTIACOMMUNIST FANATIC.
CASE IS RATHER THAT IN CATHOLIC, DC CIRCLES CONVIC-
TION IS GROWING THAT STANDING UP TO LEFTIST ADVANCE
BEATS LYING DOWN IN FRONT OF IT AND THAT COMPETITION
ACCORDING TO DEMOCRATIC RULES IS BEST STRATEGY TO
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FOLLOW. ONE QUESTION THAT TRIP FAILED TO ANSWER

IS WHETHER DC HAS ENOUGH QUALIFIED PEOPLE TO MAKE
THIS STRATEGY A WINNER FROM ELECTORAL POINT OF
VIEW.FINA

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